

['Old Jerry' Had 'Horse Sense']

Beliefs and customs Add [???] Life Histories [?] - 39

AMERICAN FOLKSTUFF

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FORM C

STATE: NEW YORK

WORKER: Earl Bowman

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SUBJECT: "OLD JERRY" HAD "HORSE SENSE"

Narrator, Tom Nolan' (Homeless)

Age 73 years

Interview at Dacca's Bookstore

63 Washington Square, So.,

New York City "OLD JERRY HAD HORSE SENSE"

(Told my Tom Nolan, homeless,

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(jobless, Irish American

(horse truck driver, displaced by

(old age and the change from

(horse to, motor trucks in

(New York City)

(Unedited)

It was a typically 'wet' New York winter night misty, drizzling, rain; the skeleton like branches of the trees in the Square dripped steadily on the deserted benches along the lonely and silent walks; a steady rhythm of warning whistles came monotonously from the fog-shrouded harbor and river. A good night to be off the streets.

On such a night Dacca's Bookstore, 63 Washington Square, So., with its ceiling-high shelves crowded with old books — dusty, smelly and intimate was a good place to be; a friendly place for men to sit and talk...

It was there, in the thick clouds of smoke from Dacca 2 and Tom Nolan's pipes and my own 'hand-rolled' cigarettes, that Old Tom, for many years a New York City horse track driver but now jobless, homeless and living by his wits because there was no place for him in the trucking or any other industrial field since 'age' and the coming of motor tracks made him 'obsolete,' discussed horse-sense versus man-sense and wondered which was most worth while; this is his story:

"Sure and it is true, Lad, that horses have 'horse sense' and men have 'man sense,' and I'll be damned if I know yet which is the better. Horses are wise, like ye say; like the cow-horses ye have been tellin' about that out-smarted the cattle and knew after very little

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experience all of the tricks of their 'profession' of ropin' and brandin' or whatever it was they were required to do out there in Texas or whichever place it was.

"The same was true of 'Old Jerry.' He had 'horse sense' and plenty of it, and I observed it many times in the twelve years that the old gray devil and me were engaged in haulin' things about New York before the damn motor trucks made us 'obsolete' and he was retired to the Company's farm over in Jersey to enjoy his hay and oats in peace for the rest of his days while I was 'retired' to — well, ye can see what I was 'retired' to merely by looking at me.

"Indeed, Jerry had horse sense and lots of it. And the 3 important thing was that he used it. He knew all the traffic rules and unlike a lot of people drivin' automobiles — and motor trucks these days, he never broke any of them. Nor did he ever 'run down' some bit of a kid that got so excited playing that he chased a ball out into the street.

"More than once I've seen Jerry set back in his shafts and hold the weight of a loaded truck, stoppin' it dead still when some kid, not lookin' what he was doin ran in front of the truck and in another instant would have been under Jerry's feet.

"Indeed, Old Jerry wanted the blood of no little child on his conscience, he was that careful of children...

"But on the other hand, I've seen him, when we were standing by the curb, reach down and nip hell out of some damned dog that was mussin' up the walk closer to him than he cared to have such things happen.

"Yes, me, Lads (a bit more of your tobaccy Dacca, if ye please) Jerry had horse sense and applied it to his daily life. He learned of his own experience that the thing to do when he heard the shriek of a fire-siren was — if there was a chance — to pull to the side and stand still, or if there was no place in which to pull out of the traffic, then to stop where he was

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until the fire wagons had passed or the noise of the siren had disappeared an some other street.

“That kind of ‘horse sense’ is the sort that comes from experience. Some horses have a good deal of it and some don't have so much. But Jerry had his share with a bit 4 more, I'm thinkin' than most horses. And I used to admire him a great deal for it in them years that Jerry and me were ‘fellow employees’ on the truck.

“But he had another sort of ‘horse sense’ I that I admired even more, and that, since I have had nothing to do but think about things...and wonder at ‘em...I'm afraid I have decided is a damned sight better than ‘man sense’...

“What I mean is that no horse, and Old Jerry least of all, ever wasted his time worryin' about the ‘future and frettin’ about what would happen to him in the future like ‘man sense’ makes men do.

“For instance, ye can go around this block...or ye can sit out in the Square on a sunny day...or ye can go down to the Bowery, or to th’ ‘flop joints’ or to the beer hang-outs and what do ye see?

“Ye see hundreds of men like meself — and many of them unlike meself who have been ‘big money shots’ in their time and thought they were on top of the world, and who have spent the best part of their lives ‘worryin’ about th’ future’ — schemin’ and plannin’, skimpin’ and savin’ and often starvin’ themselves, or even cheatin’ their fellowmen’ to get enough ahead so they would be sure not to starve — or practically starve in the ‘future.’ And what the hell happened?

“The ‘future’ sneaked-up on them in spite of all their worryin’ and schemin’ and so forth and smacked them in the eye for a row of garbage cans the same as it did me...and all their damned worryin’ and frettin’ had been for naught!

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"Many times I have worried about me 'future' which is now me 'present' and got scared for fear I would not have a place to sleep or something to eat when the damn 'future' came...So, I would skimp meself, cut down on me tobaccy, wash me own shirts instead of lettin th' [?] Chinaman do it — even do without me beer... Once I saved up \$19.00 and tucked it in me shoe, thinkin' I was on the way to bein' a 'capitalist' with me future well provided for... What happened? 'twas then that them teeth that had been botherin' me bothered me a damned sight worse and, well, hell the dentist got the \$19.00 and five dollars more out of me next two week's wages!

"'twas always the same. But still, with me 'man sense' instead of me 'horse sense' I spent a good deal of time worryin' about the 'future.' Indeed, sometimes to such an extent that it all but spoiled me enjoyment of the 'present'. Often, remorse would overtake me if I drank an extra mug or two of beer and I would find meself thinkin' — 'tom Nolan, ye damned old fool, ye had better be savin' this money ye are squanderin' on beer and tuck it away so ye'll be havin' it in the 'future' when no doubt ye'll be needin' it worse than hell!'

"Yes, I would find meself thinkin' to meself like that and 'twould spoil the enjoyment of me beer... That was me 'man sense' workin'.

"But Jerry, now, with his 'horse sense' instead of 'man sense' like we have got — Did he ever worry about th' 6 'future? He did not. When I put him in his stall at night, he knew he had earned what was comin' to him, and he knew also that he would get it and had no anxiety at all in his mind.

"He would go at his oats and his hay with a clear conscience and a good appetite — with never a thought of losin' his job or his income or of anything else to upset his digestion and cause him remorsful dreams about what might happen to him in the 'future'...

"And when the 'future' came what happened to Jerry? He — well, he, was a damned sight better off with never a minute lost in his life worrin' about the 'future' and which showed

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that he had good 'horse sense', that I was with all me damned worryin' about the 'future' of meself with me 'man sense' — I'll be damned lads, if I understand it, or know which is better 'horse sense' or man sense, and so far I've found no one else who does understand it or know what its all about..."

(Daca and I had to admit that, like Old Tom Nolan, neitherd neither did we understand it, or know what 'twas all about. And Old Tom went out in the drizzly night, shuffled along the wet street...through the mist and the fog...to a 'flop house' to sleep and perhaps still wonder what it was all about.)

END